TL1503-8

Human rights violations in East Timor

Document prepared for the 1988 Session of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities

From many sources, including Timorese who have recently left East Timor under the International Red Cross family re-unification programme, it is clear that human rights violations continue unabated in East Timor.

There has been no relaxation in tight control over access to the country, reinforcing the conclusion that the Indonesian authorities are determined to prevent the outside world from knowing the truth about conditions. The US State Department's "Country Reports on Human Rights Practice in 1987" states that "letter mail to and from East Timor is subjected to official scrutiny, restrictions exist on movement to and within East Timor, ... and the Government continued to permit selective access to the Province, primarily through escorted diplomatic visits". Amnesty International has again, this year, complained about the continuing "tight restrictions on access to the territory", as a result of which, reports of abuses "are often received long after the incident occurred".

There are still 233 persons recorded as having "disappeared" regarding whom no information is at present available. As the US State Department "Country Reports" points out, "the Government rarely, if ever, responds to enquiries about "disappearances".

In 1985, the UN Commission on Human Rights was persuaded to remove Indonesia from the list of countries under consideration in accordance with 1503, with regard to violations in East Timor. However, since that time information about abuses has continued to flow out. A careful analysis of the information received in the last year or so reveals that during 1985 and 1986, one person out of every 10 East Timorese was a victim of abuses during those two years. The kinds of abuse include imprisonment, torture, disappearance, rape and extra-judicial killings, or a combination of two or more of these abuses. The following are a few typical examples of these reported incidents:

- Two schoolboy brothers were stabbed to death by Battalion 323 soldiers because they strayed from the group they had been walking with.
- 80 people, including 30 women, all from Viqueque, were arrested and taken in trucks to the red-beret torture centre. One women named Sabina, a 15-year old, was mentioned specifically in the report: she was successively raped by four officers until she lost consciousness.

- On 26 November 1986, all males between 12 and 60 in Iliomar were arrested in retaliation for an operation by the resistance. Those considered as being "suspect" were taken to the military command and tortured. Of these, 17 were later bayonetted to death by 17 Zipur-19 Battalion soldiers, in front of the population who had been gathered for the purpose and threatened with death if any tears were shed. The names of two of the victims are known: Jaime da Costa and Martinho Hornai. The former was civil administrator Of Iliomar, the latter the traditional chief.

Reports from many sources confirm that in 1987 and the early part of this year, several new military operations were launched by the Indonesian army, including one involving a thousand elite red-beret troops. Such periods of heightened military activies invariably mean heightened abuses of the civilian population; however, information is not likely to reach the outside world for some time to come.

Show-trials

A major element in the Indonesian Government's efforts to persuade the world community not to investigate human rights abuses in East Timor any further has

been the holding of several hundred political trials which took place in Dili during 1984 and 1985. Access to the trials was denied to both Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists. However, the authorities went out of their way to make available to outside observers a complete list of the persons tried and the sentences passed. Given that such information has never before been made available by the Indonesian authorities about any of the many hundreds of political trials that have taken place in Indonesia since 1966, it soon became clear that the trials in Dili had been especially conducted in order to impress the international community, in particular the UN Commission of Human Rights.

Not until earlier this year, when an East Timorese succeeded in fleeing the country, did the scale of the deception become fully apparent. He described at length how the trials had been stage-managed. How the accused were forced to sign false confessions incriminating themselves and two other persons, so that a trial could proceed with 'evidence' from two other witnesses. The trials were each completed within a couple of days, and some commenced on the very day that the false confession had been extracted. The lawyers, supplied by the court, had no contact with the defendants; no sentences were challenged, no defence evidence was presented, no-one was acquitted and no appeals were lodged. The two hundred or so political trials in Dili were, in every sense of the term show trials.

Conclusion

In view of the continued perpetration of human rights violations in East Timor and bearing in mind the lengths to which the Indonesian authorities have gone to deceive the world community about the actual situation in East Timor, we believe that it is imperative for the Sub-Commission, at its present session:

1. to voice its deep concern about the human rights situation in East Timor,

2. to urge the Indonesian authorities to give free and unfettered access to independent observers to enter East Timor to carry out investigations of the many allegations about human rights abuses, and

3. to call upon the UN Commission on Human Rights to consider the human rights situation in East Timor at its forthcoming session in 1989.